Wangu Kanja begins this interview by questioning why people have stopped being human. She wonders why the society has become so cruel. “Rape is a crime that defies all logics. Years back, it was unconventional to hear stories of men raping their daughters but such stories abound today,” says Wangu.

After her ordeal, Wangu found solace in alcohol all in a bid to numb her pain. She even contemplated suicide. “It was difficult to have such a conversation with one’s parents since such matters were distasteful in the African culture. I felt so much alone, Wangu says.

She urges the society to embrace discussions on sexuality matters in broad daylight and also offer SGBV survivors the support they need in order to help them recover.

Wangu lost a friend and a fellow activist, Shem Mwihia, in a terrorist attack on the university campus in 2016. According to Wangu, rape cases have risen in the recent past hence the need to stop telling the tale and instead act before the situation gets out of hand.

A horrendous experience…

In 2002, while on her way home in the company of friends, Wangu’s life changed forever. “I remember it all too well. It was a rainy evening and I was in the company of two of my friends when thugs ambushed us at gunpoint. They robbed us of our personal possessions and demanded for our ATM pin numbers. Then they fled the two male friends accompanying me and held me at ransom as a bargaining power in case my friends had given out the wrong PIN,” Wangu recounts the unfortunate event that changed her life.

While some of the thugs went to withdraw cash from the nearest ATM, two of the thugs remained behind with Wangu. “Next thing, I knew one of them was demanding that I undress! My pleas for him not to rape me fell on deaf ears. He put a bullet on my arm and asked me to choose either to have the bullet go through my milt or give in to his demands. I made a difficult choice; to be raped and live,” recounts Wangu.

Although she reported the case to the police, sadly, they never caught up with the criminals. In addition, she had no one to stand with her during the torture. “It hurt so bad yet I couldn’t even speak about it as I was too afraid of the stigma,” says Wangu who at the time was 27 years.

She says some of her friends couldn’t understand what she was going through as they felt she was a grown up and should be able to handle it. Others thought she had asked for it as she made the choice. With no outlet, Wangu fell into depression and found comfort in alcohol all in a bid to numb the pain.

“It was difficult to have such a conversation with one’s parents since such matters are distasteful in the African culture. In my case, my parents didn’t help in anyway and I don’t blame them for that. I know it is not easy to be a parent and one of the hardest conversation African parents can have with their children is that of sexuality,” she notes and adds that failure by parents and the society at large to address sexuality issues has perpetrated Sexual Gender Based Violence (SGBV) cases to thrive in the country in silence.

Wangu found closure and healing two-and-a-half years later while undertaking a course in counseling. “I saw an advert on one of the daily papers of a college offering courses in guidance and counseling. I enrolled and in the process of learning, I got counseling services from a lecturer,” she says.

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Wangu feels as a country we are hurting ourselves. “Rape is a sexual offense. You can’t just put it behind you and say you’re okay. It leaves you mentally scarred and as a country we are saying we are a healing nation yet we are hurting each other. We lack supporting systems for survivors,” says Wangu.

DOS AND DONT’S AFTER A RAPE ORDEAL

RAPE OR ASSAULT may affect you emotionally or physically. Here are the dos and don’ts in case of rape.

Try as much as possible to stay calm and don’t beat yourself up with self-blame. Go to a place you would feel safe. If possible talk to a close friend or a relative to help you deal with the overwhelming emotions and take you to the hospital. Do not take a shower as this might destroy evidence against the assailant. To obtain this evidence, the doctor will need to take samples of your saliva, urine, blood and pubic hair, and swabs from your mouth, rectum and genitals. The evidence will never be used without your permission.

Go to a health facility within 72 hours because interventions that protect you as a rape survivor are usually successful within this period. One such intervention is the post-exposure prophylaxis – an antiretroviral given to a survivor who tests negative for HIV. The sooner it is initiated, the greater the chances of protecting you from HIV.

Emergency contraception is also effective within 72 hours. This prevents possibility of conceiving from a rape ordeal. You don’t want a constant reminder of the rape incident, which comes with a lot physiological trauma to process. If you change your clothes, carry the soiled clothes as this will help with collection of evidence. Do not store the clothes in a plastic bag, as this may tamper with the accuracy of the evidence. Instead, wrap them in a brown paper or a newspaper.

Report the matter to the police. A sexual assault or rape is a sexual offense. You can make the police station your next stop from the hospital. Seek the help of a counselor or help you through the process of healing. Trained trauma counsellors can be found at the health centers and hospitals. Some people may not feel safe sharing the horrific rape ordeal to a familiar person hence a counselor will be ideal. You can also visit a gender violence recovery centre where you can get help. Most of these services are free of charge.

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WANGU KANJA
Dignity restored after RAPE ORDEAL

Rape is everyone’s worst nightmare. And so is death. When Wangu Kanja was accosted by gangsters and asked to choose between the two, she went for the lesser evil and lived to tell the story. She narrates to HENRY KAHARA the ordeal that changed her life forever, how she finally found closure and is now reaching out to rape victims, helping them overcome the trauma.